

NWG's 'moral' duty

By JESS THORNE-GEORGE

Waihi wants action on concerns

Hauraki District Council's Waihi councillors have sent a submission to mining company Newmont Waihi Gold outlining concerns they have received from the town's residents.

Waihi ward chairman Sel Baker announced the submission at the council's meeting on Wednesday.

The submission voices some of the feelings expressed by residents about Newmont's proposed \$1 billion, two-part Golden Link project. Announced in August, the project would involve further underground mining in the existing Martha Mine pit and extending the Trio and Favona operations into new ground in Waihi east, the latter to be known as the Correnso underground project.

The project could extend

under law to buy houses or compensate owners for loss of property values but mentions there have been no sales in the east end of Waihi since the Correnso announcement in August and valuers have been reluctant to put values on properties without sales.

The submission states property values and saleability are the major concern of residents who have issues relating to the proposed mine, adding that some people feel "robbed of their assets by the company" and "feel trapped when they would like to have the opportunity to be able to sell within the next few years".

The submission said Newmont had a moral obligation to do something about these con-

■ Purchase of properties within close proximity to the mine where people wish to sell.

■ Cash or kind compensation for properties close to the mine area to raise values of properties.

■ General improvements to the neighbourhood.

■ An ongoing sum to form a fund where people from the mine affected areas, whose health and wellbeing are being affected by not being able to sell their property, can be compensated.

"Such a policy should be developed and announced as soon as possible as the uncertainty of the situation is putting real stress on some residents," the submission said.

Hauraki Deputy Mayor Bruce Gordon congratulated Mr Baker and his fellow ward councillors

Waihi mine's neighbours see no v

East Waihi residents cannot sell their houses as buyers shun the area close to the Martha Gold Mine. Greg Stack reports.

On the surface, the latest discovery of gold in Waihi looks appealing, but deep down discontent is brewing in the Hauraki town, with residents saying they are trapped in their own homes.

Those living near the mines say they have already been undermined and are unable to sell their houses, not in line for payouts and stuck with very few options for moving on.

The Distressed Residents Action Team (DRAT) held two meetings this week to discuss strategies to restore residential and investment confidence in Waihi.

The group is worried Newmont, which owns the Martha Gold Mine, will draw a line around an area to show who is affected and leave the rest of the town feeling the consequences, and not the benefits, of the mining operation.

They said the effects of the current mining, which include noise, dust and property damage, are already felt beyond the borders of the official affected area and were supposed to have stopped four years ago.

Gail Dragicevich and her husband moved from Napier five years ago and were among the 30 locals at the meeting. "As far as we were concerned, and

told, there was only one mine in Waihi and it was closing in 2007. It's one of the things that convinced us to come here but it has just stayed open."

She said property values in east Waihi had plummeted as buyers avoided moving near the mine, leaving long-term residents unable to sell. "You can't plan for your future and that's something you should be able to do. Instead we have to wait on the mine deciding its future. We've spent all our lives working for a house and now we can't even sell."

Local real estate agents refused to comment on the state of the property market in east Waihi but one, who refused to be named, confirmed sales in the area were non-existent.

"As an industry all the real estate companies have been meeting about the issue... and we are discussing the situation with Newmont."

He said he would not disclose sales figures before the latest mining announcement, but confirmed there had been none in east Waihi since August.

Real Estate Institute of New Zealand Waikato/Bay Of Plenty director Philip Searle said he had talked to residents.

"There is some concern that if

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Gail Dragicevich
Waihi resident

vibrations and undermining were to happen it will cause a drop in the property market because homes affected could be difficult to sell."

Waihi residents have to wait until next year for the mining giant to reveal property buyout plans but Mrs Dragicevich said there was no simple answer to the issue and throwing cash at people would not solve the problem.

Newmont external affairs manager Sefton Darby said the company had no exact data on where properties had sold but as a whole Waihi's property market "stacks up incredibly well".

"Having 350 people directly employed by the mine and 350 indirectly employed by the mine means that people are purchasing and renting in the area."

He said the company was looking at building infrastructure in Waihi to encourage people to settle in the area.

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Going down: Waihi residents are worried.
Photo: Bruce Mercer.